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AUTHOR Ekstrom, Ruth B.
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ABSTRACT

A study was made to identify the competencies women gain from their volunteer work and homemaking experiences and to develop materials helpful to women and to colleges in evaluating these experiences for college credit. By a review of the literature and interviews and surveys of adult women, the investigators identified fourteen volunteer work areas and six homemaking areas related to topics covered in many college courses. Using these twenty categories, the investigators developed a set of competency assessment tools under such areas as manager of home finances and public relations/communications. These lists are the core of a series of workbooks. One workbook for college counselors focuses on the basic phases in evaluating women's experiential learning. The first phase includes identifying student goals, identifying related background, and completing the application for admission. The second phase involves identifying the student's prior learning experiences and grouping them into clusters of related activities. In the third phase, assessment, the relevance of the student's experiential learning to departments or to specific courses is identified. Next the student and counselor determine the best method of assessing the student's prior learning, by formal or informal means. If informal evaluation is chosen, the next steps are to form an evaluation team and to prepare an assessment agreement. Following evaluation, the student is notified of the outcome and the counselor takes action for credits to be placed on the student's transcript. (LMS)

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Evaluating Women's Homemaking and Volunteer Work Experiences for College Credit

ED160772

Ruth B. Ekstrom
Educational Testing Service

Colleges have only recently begun to recognize experiential learning - knowledge which comes from having done something rather than from formal, classroom instruction. But many of these programs have recognized only the experiential learning that comes from paid work; learning from non-paid activities, such as volunteer work and homemaking has been largely neglected.

In 1974, under a grant from the Fund for Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, my colleagues Marlaine Lockheed, Abigail Harris, and I began a study to identify the competencies which women acquire from their volunteer work and homemaking experiences and to develop materials which would be helpful to women and to colleges in evaluating these experiences.

Identification of Competencies. The first phase of our project involved identifying the skills and competencies which women have acquired through their unpaid work experiences. We chose to concentrate on competencies because such an approach seems to help colleges to understand that learning had taken place. This approach also helps women in describing their volunteer experience in terms of the work involved

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rather than in terms of the organizational setting.

When a woman says to a college - or to a prospective employer - "I've done a lot of work for the local Conservation Club", it is difficult to know what kind of work was involved and how it relates to a college curriculum or to a paid job. If, instead, this woman can say "I developed and conducted a survey of regional environmental problems in our area, analyzed the results, reviewed existing state environmental legislation in relation to these problems identified by the survey, drafted new legislation to cover a major problem not covered by existing laws, and successfully lobbied for the passage of this legislation in our state," she is much more likely to have her skills in survey design, data analysis, lobbying, and her knowledge of environmental science recognized. By stressing competencies, we are attempting to highlight the similarities between knowledge and skills learned in other settings and those acquired in the classroom.

We did three things to identify the competencies which women acquire from their volunteer work and homemaking experiences. The first was a review of the literature about volunteer work and homemaking. A 1969 survey by the U.S. Manpower Administration indicated that the volunteer work done by women was chiefly fund raising, administration, and leading youth groups. Project Second Start, which assessed how adult programs at Brooklyn College met the needs of low income women, found that these women had acquired a variety of academically relevant skills from unpaid work. These include: 1) organizational, managerial, and leadership skills through community planning and politics and from belonging to tenants', women's, and religious groups; 2) technical and professional skills such as accounting, editing, researching, and translating; 3) recreational and cultural skills through experience in theater, arts and crafts, music,

dance, painting, and decorating; and 4) skills relevant to health, education, and welfare acquired while working with children, youth groups, and the aging in the home or in child care facilities, counseling centers, and hospitals.

These and other materials in the literature helped us to develop some rough categories to describe volunteer work and homemaking. We used these categories as a basis for our next two activities - talking to groups of women to learn more about their experiences and conducting surveys of several groups to identify the homemaking and volunteer work activities of adult women.

As a result of these interviews and the surveys, we identified fourteen volunteer work areas and six homemaking areas which appeared to be those involving fairly large numbers of women and to be fairly clearly related to topics covered in the curricula of many colleges. From the literature on volunteer work and homemaking and from our contacts with women's groups and volunteer organizations and agencies, we obtained task analysis or job description information about these twenty categories of non-market work. These descriptions formed the basis for the development of a set of competency assessment tools which we call the "I Can" lists. We were assisted in the development of some of the "I Can" lists for volunteers by the Council of National Organizations for Adult Education's Task Force on Volunteer Accreditation."

You have in the handout some examples of these "I Can" lists - those for Administrator/Manager, Manager of Home Finances, Public Relations/ Communications, and Trainer. As you can see, each "I Can" list begins by describing how we define this area of work. The lists themselves are not meant to be an exhaustive or comprehensive coverage of these non-market jobs. Neither do we expect a woman to have all of the competencies in

any of these areas. Rather, the "I Can" lists are a starting point to help women and college counselors identify areas which are most appropriate for evaluation of experiential learning.

The "I Can" lists are the core of a series of workbooks which our project is producing. The first of these workbooks, "How to Get College Credit for What You Have Learned as a Homemaker and Volunteer" is designed for adult women entering or re-entering college and is available from ETS. A description of the workbook contents and ordering information is included in the handout. A second workbook for college counselors, entitled "Evaluating Women's Life Experience Competencies for College Credit" is being completed by Marlaine Lockheed. This workbook focuses on the basic steps involved in evaluating women's experiential learning from volunteer work and homemaking. These steps are listed in the handout. I'd like to discuss them with you.

The first phase involves the initial counseling of students seeking college credit for experiential learning. There are three main steps in this phase: 1) identifying student goals, 2) identifying related background, and 3) completing the application for admission. This phase of working with women seeking an evaluation of their experiential learning is not very different than that involved in the initial counseling of other re-entry students. It is important, during this counseling, to get a clear understanding of the student's goals and to be sure that the proposed program of study is one which has or is likely to accept experiential learning. This is also the time to help the student examine the comparative costs and benefits (in terms of both time and money) of credit-by-examination programs and regular courses. You should, of course, review the student's background to identify previous college courses or other relevant education as well as the kinds of non-formal learning experiences which the woman

has had. Finally, you will work with the student to complete the admissions application and a financial aid application if it is needed. It is important to be sure that the adult student entering into a program for the assessment of experiential learning understand the registration procedures and costs involved, especially how these differ from traditional courses, the problems that may be involved in transfering credits for experiential learning, and the college's rules and regulations which may limit the number of prior learning credits or the kinds of degree programs in which these credits can be applied. Adult students have other special needs. This initial counseling is also a good time to tell the woman about special groups on your campus for women and/or adult students. Information about academic advisement and counseling services, employment opportunities, housing and/or transportation, child care and health care programs, and student activities and recreation should also be provided.

The second phase of the evaluation procedure involves initiating the actual procedures for accrediting prior learning. Some colleges have special courses to help students in this process. Often, however, the student's counselor must take the full responsibility for these activities. This phase begins with the identification of all of the student's prior learning experiences. We suggest that the student prepare a reverse chronology of her life covering her homemaking, volunteer work, employment, and travel. This list or outline is then reviewed by the counselor; and student together. Using the "I Can" lists, they identify the learnings, skills and competencies underlying these experiences. Next they group these learning experiences into clusters of related activities. Fo- example, Jane has been a volunteer in a women's organization and in an environmental group. She edits the newsletter for the women's organization. She has also spoken to meetings of other women's groups about the program

which her group has developed for single parents. She has written the script for and produced a program on clean air which has been shown on her city's educational TV station. All of these activities - editing a newsletter, giving speeches, writing and producing a TV program - involve communications skills and can be grouped together. After the student has labeled and clustered groups of related experiences, she can develop hew own personal "I Can" lists for each area. These lists then serve to define the scope of the assessment. The counselor should then discuss with the student the resources which she has available to document that she does, indeed, have the competencies which she has listed. These documentation resources might include work samples, volunteer job descriptions, awards for volunteer service, certificates of training, and recommendations from supervisors and co-workers. With this information at hand, the counselor is prepared to help the student enter into the third phase, the assessment process itself.

Several major decisions for the student, aided by the counselor, are part of the assessment process. The first of these involves identifying the relevance of the student's prior experiential learning to departments or to specific courses. Some colleges will award credit only for experiential learning which is essentially comparable to that acquired in a course which the college offers. Others "stretch" this rule by awarding credit for independent study in a given department when the learning is obviously relevant to that field but is not covered in a currently offered course. Still other colleges award general credits in a field related to the prior learning without requiring any special course designation. Next the student and counselor must determine the best method, in each area, to assess the student's prior learning. There are two major categories of assessment procedures: 1) formal assessment, involves

having the student take a test in a credit-by-examination program such as CLEP, having the student take a college-prepared "challenge" exam for a particular course, or having the student take a performance examination where she may demonstrate her skills; and, 2) informal assessment, involves having the student prepare a portfolio of her work, having faculty interview the student about her experiences, having the student prepare a descriptive paper about her experiences, or having a simulation or demonstration of student skills. Formal examinations are most appropriate when the nature of the student's learning experiences are highly relevant to the test content. The awarding of credit is usually predetermined by institutional policies for "passing" and "grade" scores. Informal evaluation is more complex. The next step, if informal evaluation of the student experience is to be done, is to form an evaluation team for each area to be assessed. These teams are often composed of the student's counselor and two faculty members from the appropriate department. If the faculty members have not previously been involved in the assessment of prior experiential learning, the counselor should be prepared to spend sufficient time, prior to the assessment itself, to orient them to their task. After the assessment team has been formed, an assessment agreement should be prepared. This agreement should specify: 1) the content of the assessment, 2) the relationship between the assessment and the subject area or course designation, 3) the method of assessement, and 4) the number or range of credits that may be awarded. Using this agreement, the student then prepares the materials necessary for the assessment. Several publications to help faculty and students in understanding and preparing for the assessment of prior learning are available from CAEL (The Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning). When the portfolio or other assessment materials have been

completed, they are reviewed by the assessment team. Evaluation is based on the same kind of expert judgment faculty members make in grading papers or assessing other course work. The student is notified of the outcome of the assessment and the counselor then takes the action for the credits to be placed on the student's transcript.